DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 314 777 CS 506 987

AUTHOR Cruice, Gary G., Jr.
TITLE Communication Skills Textbooks.
PUB DATE Nov 89
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (75th, San Francisco, CA, November 18-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Course Content; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Language Arts; Skill Development; Speech Communication; *Textbooks; *Textbook Selection; Writing Across the Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS *Course Development

ABSTRACT

The first roadblock encountered in an effort to develop an interdisciplinary communications skills course at the university level was the discovery that no suitable textbooks exist for such a course. First, texts widely used for basic speech courses do not attempt to incorporate written and spoken communication, much less computer skills. Second, writing and language arts textbooks merely do a fair job of integrating all communication skills, but at a level unsuitable for university use. Third, applicable computer software also is geared only to elementary students. There is, however, at least one speech textbook ("Communicating" by Berko, Wolvin and Wolvin) which attempts to deal with written and spoken language and which does explain the origins of language and meaning as well as the acquisition of language, but it is not all-encompassing. It may be that a course of this nature is too new or limited a concept for texts to have been developed. Moreover, if a university plans on offering such a course as the only way to offer students a chance to integrate their communication skills rather than the chance to use these skills across the curriculum, then such a course is a bad idea. If, on the other hand, the university plans on offering an interdisciplinary course as a component of a core curriculum, then such a course would be an excellent idea. (KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED314777

COMMUNICATION SKILLS TEXTBOOKS

by

Gary G. Cruice, Jr.
Xavier University

A paper presented at the
Seventy-Fifth Annual Meeting of the
Speech Communication Association.
San Francisco, California. 1989.

This paper defines what is meant by the term "communication skills" and reports the results of the author's efforts to find a textbook that could be used for an interdisciplinary course in communication skills and/or language development.

CS506887

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Gary G. Cruice, Jr.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "It means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master - that's all."

In any interaction it is language that allows humans to make sense of their world. This language is often of a very ambiguous nature (as Alice found out!) Yet very few of us ever take the time to think about how we use language, or why, or what the world would be like without language, or how language affects thought.

Most humans go through their daily routines with no conception of how or why they make sense of their world. In many professions this behavior is acceptable, (even encouraged) but for educators it is not. Those of us who have the job of teaching people about an area of study also have the task of teaching people how to think.

To think one must use language and symbols. (Try thinking a thought without using words or symbols of some sort!) To express our thoughts to others we must use language - an act known as communication. However, the ability to use language, to communicate, is taken for granted in most classrooms. The assumption that students will learn to speak and listen on their own, learn to read in reading class, and learn to write in English class is still a popular one. However, it is an unrealistic view - one that no longer serves the interests of the student or the teacher.

One can find programs, such as the one funded by the Bush Foundation at Xavier, which attempt to integrate the teaching of writing skills across the curriculum. Some schools even have programs that attempt to increase the teaching of critical thinking skills in all classes. Many of these programs include improved oral skills as one of their aims, but few take a complete "communication skills" approach.

It should be noted that communication skills are no longer limited to reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Today's technological society almost demands that individuals be able to communicate through several other mediums. We are expected to send and receive messages through various electronic media including radio, TV, telephone, and computer.

Too often the forms of electronically mediated communications are overlooked, yet all have proven their staying power and none show any signs of disappearing. It may be difficult to incorporate phone skills or interactive video into all classes, but computer usage can be incorporated into almost every course. According to Brian Hendley, "Computer Literacy now ranks alongside the traditional three R's as part of the minimal achievement that every student can reasonably be expected to attain." (p111)

It seems that a teacher in a given content area would have a very difficult time incorporating all communication skills into one course, but it really isn't that difficult. As was previously mentioned, many have already incorporated the teaching of writing and/or critical thinking skills into their content areas. However, this author knows of no course that teaches all of these skills. It was my intention to develop an interdisciplinary communication skills course. However, I ran into my first roadblock in trying to find a suitable text.

Being a speech teacher, I started my quest with the more popular basic course texts. Xavier uses Principles of Speech Communication by Gronbeck, et al. This text and Lucas' The Art of Public Speaking are two of the most widely used texts for the basic speech course. Neither, however, attempts to incorporate written and spoken communication, much less computer skills. I surveyed several other universities and was told that the texts used there were of the same sort.

The next step was to check writing textbooks. The faculty in Xavier's English department and the Writing Center all agreed that there were no such texts. Calls to publishers and secondary teachers resulted in several language arts texts that did a fair job of integrating all communication skills, but at a level unsuitable for university use.

I then turned to computer software and found that the situation was even worse. All of the applicable software was geared to elementary students. I did come across a project developed by CORDATA. This is an entirely interactive classroom. While the concept was not suitable for my purposes, their representative, Dave Uslan, helped me to put together a proposed system for speech remediation. It consists of a speech synthesizer and voice recognition unit using WordTalk software on an IBM compatible computer. This is still a far cry from the original purpose - an interdisciplinary communication skills class.

There is at least one speech textbook which attempts to deal with written and spoken language - Communicating by Berko, Wolvin & Wolvin. This text is by no means a perfect book, but the authors do explain the origins of language and meaning as well as the acquisition of language. After these explanations they discuss the differences between oral and written language followed by a discussion of dialects.

As one can probably tell, there are really no textbooks suitable for the type of course proposed here. It may be that this is too new or limited a concept for texts to have been developed, or it may be that the course is a bad idea. If a university plans on offering such a course as the only way to offer students a chance to integrate their communication skills, then such a course is a very bad idea. If, on the other hand, a university plans on offering an interdisciplinary communication skills course as a component of a core (or introductory) curriculum, and expects those skills learned by students to be used in courses across the curriculum; then such a course would be an excellent idea.

Beyond the lack of a suitable text, anyone attempting to develop an interdisciplinary course knows of the "academic turf wars". Add to this the inertia that most schools face when adding required courses, and one can see the problems inherent in developing a course such as the one proposed here. For now, I've given up hope of a university adopting a true communication skills course; and have shifted, instead, to developing a writing intensive speech class. High hopes, small steps!

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A Look at the Future. (1989) Technological Horizons in Education, 16: 37-41.

Berko, R.M., A.D. & D.R. Wolvin. (1989) Communicating: A Social and Career Focus. Dallas: Houghton Mifflin.

Carroll, L. (1960) Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass. New York: Signet Classics.

Goss, B. (1983) Communication in Everyday Life. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

Gronbeck, B.E., D. Ehninger, A. Monroe, & K. German. (1988) Principles of Speech Communication. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Forseman.

Hendley, B. (1986) Dewey, Russell, Whitehead: Philosophers as Educators. Carbondale:Southern Illinois University Press.

Lucas, S.E. (1989) The Art of Public Speaking. New York: Random House.

Osborn, M. & S. (1988) Public Speaking. Dallas: Houghton Mifflin.